

New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

New Hampshire Department of Transportation, PO Box 483, Concord, NH 03302



July 25, 2014

Meredith Hatfield, Director
Office of Energy and Planning
107 Pleasant Street
Concord, NH 03301

Re: Letter of Support for Commuter Rail as a Transportation Alternative

Dear Ms. Hatfield,

I am writing on behalf of the NH Rail Transit Authority (NHRTA). The Authority was established in 2007 by the legislature to oversee the redevelopment of commuter rail service in New Hampshire. The main focus of the Authority at this time is to pursue the resumption of commuter rail service in the Boston to Concord corridor, known as the NH Capitol Corridor. In that regard, I am writing to support the inclusion of passenger rail as an important transportation alternative for the State Energy Strategy.

Passenger rail touches several areas of New Hampshire and contributes to fewer vehicle miles traveled and lower use of fossil fuels. There are five corridors that the Authority is monitoring and studying: the New Hampshire Capitol Corridor (Boston to Concord) Transportation Alternatives Analysis; the Town of Plaistow extension study from Haverhill; the Amtrak line known as the Knowledge Corridor from New Haven to Montreal, passing through Claremont; the Amtrak Downeaster-Boston to Brunswick, Maine, passing through Exeter, Durham and Dover; and Train Hotel, a private initiative projected to travel from Montreal to Portland, Maine through Coos County.

The NH Capitol Corridor is the only rail corridor with a population of 500,000 in the country that is not served by commuter rail. The consultant estimates a daily ridership of at least 3100 passenger to/from New Hampshire. I have attached an addendum outlining the considerable interest and activity surrounding passenger rail in New Hampshire, as well as links to additional information on a few of the projects.

Commuter rails makes valuable contributions to economic develop and job creation and retention. The City of Dover has developed a Transit Oriented Development zone around its train station that has been highly successful. The development in Freeport and Brunswick Maine also demonstrates the willingness of developers and businesses to improve station areas and increase economic activity in the community.

Changing perceptions and desires for lifestyles are important factors that influence young, educated professionals to locate in a particular area. Commuter rail often enhance walkable communities that are a particular attraction.

As you go forward with your review of your draft, I urge you to give consideration of the important impacts passenger rail provides to a viable Energy Strategy for the state.

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Please contact me by phone (494-2579) or email if you wish to pursue this information further.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Mahon
Chairman

New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

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NHRTA Letter of Support – Addendum

The New Hampshire Capitol Corridor is included as an unfunded priority in the recently adopted State Ten Year Transportation Improvement Program (HB 2014). One of the requirements for the corridor study is a viable financial plan.

State 10 Year Transportation Improvement Plan

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2014/HB2014.pdf>

A \$4.1M study of transportation alternatives in this corridor is currently being conducted by a consultant, URS, and the NH Department of Transportation in cooperation with the NHRTA. The study is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2014.

NH Capitol Corridor Alternatives Analysis and Service Development Plan

<http://www.nhcapitolcorridor.com/>

NHDOT is conducting a similar study for the extension of commuter service from Boston to Plaistow.

Plaistow Commuter Rail Extension Study

<http://www.nh.gov/dot/org/aerorailtransit/railandtransit/plaistow-rail-study/index.htm>

The Somersworth City Council recently established a Commuter Rail Study Committee to explore extension of commuter service to Somersworth and potentially Rochester.

Using a Federal Transit Authority (FTA) Model (Aggregate Rail Ridership Forecasting Model 2.0) the consultant has made a conservative estimate of up to 3100 boarding per week day on the New Hampshire Capitol Corridor. This estimate does not account for casual and weekend users. The estimate is also twice the reported weekly ridership for the Downeaster.

Northern New England Rail Passenger Authority

<http://www.nnepra.com/reports-and-statistics>

While the Downeaster is referred to in the First Draft as primarily impacting tourism, the service is receiving additional financial support from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for passengers regularly commuting from New Hampshire to Boston.

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NHRTA Letter of Support – Addendum(2)

Two studies conducted by the UNH Survey Center in 2009 and 2013 (conducted for the Nashua Chamber of Commerce) show that at least 68% of NH residents favor commuter rail service as an additional transportation alternative.

Granite State Poll for New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority (2009)

<http://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/nhrta/documents/NHRTAFinal1.pdf>

The University of New Hampshire's surveys of entering students reveals a growing number of students (over 5%) who cited access to train service to Boston as one reason they selected UNH-Durham. There are estimated to be over 15,000 students attending post-secondary schools in the corridor.

Business and industry leaders point out to us that a commuter rail service is essential to attract and retain young, highly educated employees and promote economic development in the corridor. Another important component of the corridor analysis is the economic impacts of the resumption of service.

The City of Nashua is working diligently to attract and retain young professionals and is taking an active role in support of commuter rail. The city has committed \$1.7M to acquire a property on Crown Street that has been identified by the NH Capitol Corridor consultant as a station location.

The cities of Concord, Manchester and Nashua all have developed Transit Oriented Development (TOD) schemes for their downtown areas. The City of Dover has experienced significant development in the area around the station. UNH reports that a growing percentage of students are selecting UNH because of access to rail service to Boston. There are over 15,000 students in the NH Capitol Corridor that could benefit from this service.